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SUBJECT: PROFILE OF MALAYSIAN AMBASSADOR RAJMAH HUSSAIN

Classified By: Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte for reason 1.4 (c)

11. (C) Summary and Introduction. Malaysian Ambassador Rajmah Hussain, designated next Malaysian Ambassador to Washington, arrived Vienna 16 months ago from her previous position as Ambassador to the CD in Geneva. While in Vienna, Hussain served as chair of the Vienna Chapter of the Non-Aligned Movement, using that position to counter U.S. initiatives and lend support to Iranian arguments on their nuclear program. Hussain traveled to New York in May 2005 where she ended up coordinating (reportedly unhelpful) New York NAM positions at the NPT Review Conference. She told us she takes full credit for establishing in May 2005 the first Vienna chapter of the Organization of Islamic Countries and achieving observer status for this organization at the IAEA General Conference. She has noted privately that NAM and other organizations are important for defending the rights of other countries vis--vis the superpower. End Summary and Introduction.

12. (C) Hussain has served in Washington before, as DCM. She is without immediate family, though her parents are still alive and she has many siblings. She told us a year ago she considered Vienna her last assignment before retirement. She can come across as conversationally engaging, but periodically seeks to trap interlocutors into principled positions on non-proliferation or Iran. She appears to pride herself on leading groups. She has asserted her primary responsibility is to represent NAM positions, and not necessarily Malaysian positions. Against this background, she has exercised almost dictatorial control of NAM meetings - according to some of her colleagues - and sets NAM policies by declaring them herself. However, she has not won all battles.

13. (C) During Hussain's time in Vienna, the NAM has become a tougher adversary on political issues. Hussain has tried to seize any issue at all away from G-77 purview and embrace it in the NAM. She has successfully upstaged the G-77 to this end.

14. (C) Hussain has forcefully trumpeted the NAM mantra that defends Iran's rights to peaceful nuclear technologies, without criticizing Iran's noncompliance with its NPT obligations and its diminishing cooperation with the IAEA to resolve the outstanding issues and restore international confidence. During the particularly difficult September and February IAEA Board of Governors meetings, which witnessed contentious votes on Iran that split the NAM, she delivered very emotional, almost combative statements.

15. (C) Some believe that Hussain has championed Iranian positions within the NAM to such a degree as to almost allow the Iranians to draft the substance of NAM statements and positions that are eventually adopted. This has caused chagrin among some NAM delegations. However, we have been told by some NAM Ambassadors that when they question aspects

to the Iran issue in NAM meetings, Hussain either allows the Iranians to unleash polemical tirades against them, and/or rules against them. Some indicate to us that it is just easier to go along with the herd than fight for what become incremental changes to statements. Hussain has come across de facto as one of Iran's key supporters in Vienna. Indeed, the South African Governor (a member of the NAM troika leadership) told us during a recent Board meeting that he had tried to get her to amend and soften the NAM statement on Iran in order to make it more realistic. However he said the Malaysian flatly refused.

¶16. (C) In mid-2005 when UNVIE was soliciting support for the Committee on Safeguards and Verification, Hussain was reportedly working actively against the Committee. In fact, other NAM delegations told us she had commissioned an internal working group to torpedo the Committee. To circumvent her, UNVIE approached the chairs of the three regional sub-groups within the NAM (Asia Group, Africa Group, GRULAC) and offered special briefings on the Committee, and only afterwards offered the same briefing to Hussain and the full NAM. She was angry to learn we had done this without working through her, though we explained we were doing it so we could deal with smaller groups. When we went to brief the full NAM, she had us promise to not engage in direct discussion with the floor, but only through her. In the end, our working with the chairs of and individual members of the sub-groups marginalized Hussain and allowed Board approval by consensus of the Committee.

¶17. (C) In the final run-up to the Board decision to adopt the Committee, the South African Governor told us he had had to part ways with Hussain and "bypass the NAM itself" to permit the broad support needed to approve the Committee and dodge Hussain's efforts against the initiative. The Indian Ambassador advised us on the day of approval to move the issue to a decision before the Board floor debate to minimize her influence over the issue during the floor debate. (We did so.) In the end, the Board supported the Committee by consensus and Hussain sat in the back of the room fuming and apparently refusing to speak to anyone.

¶18. (C) Hussain advertised widely that she was being sent by her government in mid-2005 to the New York NPT Review Conference to help coordinate NAM positions focusing on disarmament. In fact, she claims she wound up chairing most of the NAM meetings at the RevCon. Hussain is proud for promoting her "principled" positions on disarmament and "rights" to peaceful nuclear uses. She exudes a proclivity to uncompromising dogmatism in these areas.

¶19. (C) More recently, Hussain told us in early June that she took full responsibility for the Creation of a Vienna chapter of the Organization of Islamic Countries. She said that it was important to have such an organization here, since the OIC was interested in disarmament (sic) and non-proliferation. Most Vienna missions are unaware of her efforts. In mid-June the IAEA Board of Governors approved an OIC request to participate as an observer in the September IAEA Board of Governors meeting.

¶110. (C) Two of our working-level NAM contacts told us on the record recently that Hussain has "generally been effective" in her position as NAM Chair. She received high marks from them for objectivity, management style, and intellect. They said she listened to the views of the disparate members and then was decisive once she has decided on an issue. They both lauded her objectivity and ability to shape the NAM agenda during plenary meetings. However, these and other delegates privately often tell us they chafe under her dictatorial methods and proclivity to press hardened ideological positions. One of our contacts said Hussain was "not well liked" by other NAM Ambassadors, and has been described as "difficult" and "obstinate," though many acknowledge her as being "friendly." We have heard that she can be a hothead prone to emotional outbursts, especially during times of duress such as in the debates on Iran that took place during the September and February Board meetings.

¶11. (C) A senior IAEA official who has known her for several years described her as uncompromising and dogmatic, which limits the IAEA's ability to work with her. Indeed, the official said that IAEA senior leadership shrug her off as a less serious player who cannot bring added value to debates.

¶12. (C) Despite her prickly dealings on Iran and other IAEA issues, Hussain has been relatively constructive in other fora when dealing with issues of mutual interest. In discussions on whether to share seismic data from the International Monitoring System (IMS) with national and regional tsunami alert organizations, Hussain was an articulate advocate for making the data readily available. She argued forcefully about the moral obligation of states to contribute to the global effort to help prevent a reprise of the devastation caused by the Asian tsunami of December 2004, and has reminded colleagues of the embarrassing public relations consequences of not providing tsunami alert organizations with data that can improve the accuracy of predictions on the likelihood and course of a tsunami.

¶13. (C) Hussein has not shied from challenging those among her Group of 77 colleagues -- including the Chinese delegation -- which has resorted to legalistic and procedural arguments to block agreement on a permanent data-sharing arrangement with alert organizations. Hussein has had no reservations about associating herself with the U.S. position during multilateral discussions of this issue, when positions coincided.

¶14. (C) While in Vienna, Hussain was almost exclusively playing the role of NAM Chair. She knew her script well, but had the acumen and flexibility to successfully deal with a much broader set of issues. However, she has indicated little receptivity to hearing out or trying to understand U.S. positions. In this regard, she has demonstrated little inclination to compromise on issues. Some believe this betrays a certain lack of intellectual acuity. She can occasionally offer unpredictable and ideologically-laced comments about U.S. nuclear history and policy (Hiroshima) and disarmament. Hussain has told us that one of her top priorities in Washington will be to negotiate a free trade agreement with the U.S.

SCHULTE